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A VISIT TO HORACE'S SABINE FARM

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Of all the Latin authors whose writings have come down to us the modern scholar is drawn by the strongest ties to three: the Tusculan philosopher, the Mantuan singer, and the moralist poet of Venusia. Caesar, whose commentaries are read by thousands of schoolboys in every civilized land, is remote from our sympathies by reason of his very greatness. He is too great to be really human. Admire him we must; but love him, as we love the other three, is quite beyond our powers. Of the three named, the Sabine poet stands easily first in our affections. His very foibles, so intensely human, establish an added bond between the poet and his readers. There is a comradeship about Horace that we miss in Vergil and especially in Cicero. The quality that distinguishes "Bobby" Burns from Tennyson and dear old Elia from, say, Carlyle, attaches to the poet of the Sabine farm and distinguishes him alike from the Mantuan singer and the Tusculan sage. Horace is a sort of cross between Burns and Austin Dobson, as human as the former, though less spontaneous, and even more dainty and artistic—some would say artificial—than the latter. Both Tusculum and Mantua are revered names, but the Sabine farm, with its Bandusian Fount, is a hallowed shrine to which the heart loves to make pilgrimage. Maecenas presented Horace with the Sabine estate in 35 or 34 B.C.—probably the latter year—and from that time till his death, twenty-six years later, Horace spent here each year a large, and increasingly larger, part of his time. Of course, he made frequent trips to Rome—a distance of twenty-eight miles, which Horace often covered on his docked mule in a single day—to Baiae, his favorite sea-side resort, to Praeneste, where he often went for the splendid prospect and the fine air and the quiet, and to Tibur, where Maecenas had a villa with splendid grounds on the edge of

the cliff overlooking the falls of the Anio, and where, too, Horace often broke his journey between his farm and the Capital, as an over-night guest of his great patron and benefactor. But more and more, the noise and annoyances of the great city, where he was constantly importuned to use his offices as a go-between to solicit favors from Augustus or Maecenas, his intimate relations with whom were well known, became distasteful to him and his visits to Rome became less frequent and less protracted. The quiet of the country, the charm of its scenery, the self-respect of his neighbors, the leisure and repose which the little farm assured him for reflection and composition, as well as the modest but sufficient income which it brought to him, appealed to him ever more strongly and made him increasingly indisposed to leave his Sabine estate, even for a season. Here most of his best writing was done; and, although in later years his references to his little estate and the surrounding country became less frequent and finally ceased altogether, we know that, of all Horace's homes, the Sabine farm was not only his favorite but, more than any other and all others, it is associated with his personality and gave tone and suggestion to his writings.

From Horace's frequent references to Tibur, some of his editors have been inclined to place in that region the home of his old age, and a wholly unwarranted local tradition gives to some ancient remains on the hillside facing the falls of the Anio the name of Horace's villa; but the best authorities now agree that this is the site of Catullus'—not Horace's—villa, and there is no sufficient reason to suppose that Horace ever lived at Tibur. He undoubtedly was a frequent and always welcome guest at Maecenas' magnificent Tiburtine villa, and some scholars even claim to have found the remains of a modest cottage in Maecenas' grounds at Tibur, to which local legend assigns the name Villa d' Orazio. Horace may, it is true, have occupied this villa for longer or shorter periods in passing to and fro between Rome and his Sabine estate or while paying a special visit to his influential friend. Maecenas, we know, was always inviting him and even accused him of ingratitude for not coming oftener to see him; but Horace was far too independent, too fixed in his bachelor and somewhat Bohemian ways, and too ardent a disciple of the simple life, to find the conventions of a

great establishment, like that of Maecenas, agreeable or even tolerable for any long period.

The Horatian tradition still haunts the region immediately surrounding the supposed site of the Sabine farm and, doubtless, has been continuous from Horace's day to our own. Horace nowhere speaks of owning a villa at Tibur, although he often speaks of being there; but he does speak repeatedly and in terms of warmest affection of his villa on the Sabine farm.

On December 24, 1909, it was my privilege to pay a visit to what is generally conceded to be the site of Horace's Sabine villa. At the early breakfast which I had ordered the night before at my hotel on the Pincian Hill, I told my waiter, a bright Roman boy of twenty-one or twenty-two, where I was going; but he had never heard of Horace and knew nothing of the history of Horace's day. My companion and myself took the 7:35 A.M. train from Rome for Vicovaro, the nearest station to the supposed site of the farm—the Vicus Varia of Horace's day and his nearest market town. The present-day town boasts a population of about 2,000. It is located high on the hillside, across the Anio to the left from the railway station, and about a quarter of an hour's walk distant. We followed the dozen or more peasants, all with well-filled bags slung over their backs, who left the train on which we had ridden from Rome, and, after a sharp climb, found ourselves in apparently the principal one of the three or four long, parallel streets which make up the town. As we came along, we inquired of the little party which had left the train with us, whether it would be possible to procure a conveyance of any sort in the village. They all thought not—said, indeed, that there was no carriage in town; but finally one of the party bethought himself of a certain keeper of a small inn—the only one in town, so far as we could learn—who owned a couple of donkeys and possessed some sort of a cart, in which he sometimes drove them singly. This man offered to pilot us to the inn. The inn-keeper, after considerable negotiation, agreed to take us to the farm and thence to Tivoli, in time for the four o'clock train for Rome, for the sum of 14 lire, about \$2.75. He promised to be ready in fifteen minutes, and meanwhile ushered us into the general room at the inn—a combined sitting-room, storeroom,

taproom, dining-room, and kitchen. Six or eight men and two or three women were smoking about the long table at one end of the room and the landlord's wife was cooking the dinner in various brass kettles over a coal fire in a smoky fireplace at the other end. A chicken and a very lean kitten hung around the fireplace and occasionally helped themselves, surreptitiously, from the open pots over the coals. When the potatoes were cooked, the woman mashed them in an antique looking, four-handled stone mortar and mixed the mashed potatoes with some newly cooked macaroni, this composition constituting, apparently, the *pièce de resistance* of the meal. There were several children in the family—the youngest visible member a boy of two, the oldest a girl just entering her teens—all remarkably handsome, with brilliant black eyes and regular features, perhaps a trifle too heavy in the case of the girls. Italian peasant children as a rule are handsome, but lose their good looks early, particularly the women. The baby in this particular group eyed us curiously and I offered him a 20 centissimi piece, which he declined, showing how unspoiled the children of the peasantry are away from the beaten routes of travel. In Rome, or even in Tivoli, this child would not only have taken the money when offered but would, in all probability, have asked for money. I learned that the little fellow's name was Terzino, a relic, apparently, of the old Roman fashion of naming the children by numerals, indicating the order of birth.

Just then the landlord came in to say that his donkey had gone for a load of wood and we must wait fifteen minutes longer. This proved to be over an hour. To while away the time, we strolled out into the town. Vicovaro is a very old and dilapidated town, with some of the old Roman walls still standing, and has unspeakably filthy streets, like most Italian country towns. It possesses, apparently, no sewer system and no public water supply. Certainly the ordinary decencies of life were conspicuous by their absence and we needed to walk circumspectly, even through the principal streets of the town. The chief attraction of the town is the beautiful little church of San Giacomo, dating from the Renaissance period—the work of Simone, a pupil of Brunelleschi, one of the greatest of mediaeval Italian architects. The lovely eastern

façade is adorned by the figures of various saints and above the door is a bas-relief of St. James and St. Peter in the act of presenting to the Virgin the two founders of the church, members of the famous Orsini family.

Finally the "voiture" appeared, a rough, two-wheeled donkey cart but with a cushioned seat, attached to which was a most diminutive saw-backed, iron-gray donkey with a harness almost as heavy as himself. The thills were ponderous affairs and were attached to the harness at a point high above the donkey's back and extended to a point well beyond and above his head. When my companion and I took our places on the cushioned seat at the back of the cart we seemed in imminent danger of lifting the little donkey off his feet, if not of throwing him, feet uppermost, over our heads. We felt relieved when the driver took hold of his bridle and led him down the steep hill to the main traveled road, which skirts the town at a much lower level. Here the driver mounted, seating himself on an improvised board seat across the front of the cart. As is usually the case in Italy, the donkey was driven without bits and the driver yanked the lines furiously in his effort to guide the animal, all the while cracking his whip loudly about the donkey's ears. Our course followed the ancient Via Valeria, running at first high above the stream but gradually approaching the level of the river. Presently we left the Anio and skirted, for the remainder of our course, the Licenza, a confluent stream (the Rivus Digentia of Horace). This is a small stream, running a meandering course in its broad, gravelly bed, but in times of flood it spreads over a wide channel, carrying down immense quantities of sand, gravel, and humus from the steep, treeless, and easily washed hillsides which closely hem in the narrow valley on either hand. We passed occasionally a peasant's hut of stone, partially covered with stucco or wattled reeds, and surrounded by a small olive grove; but, in the main, the country was uninhabited. As we proceeded, the hills became steeper and bolder and drew in closer to the stream. Here and there, from its high, rocky headland, loomed some ancient town, as Saracinesco, the town of the Saracens, or Mandela, the Bardela of Horace, sharply defined against the horizon. The fields immediately surrounding these towns were green with cul-

tivated crops, mainly barley or flax, but, with these exceptions, the whole country seemed to be uncultivated and unused save as a sheep run. Some five miles from Vicovaro we left the main traveled road, the Via Valeria, and climbed, by a steep, zig-zag, roughly macadamized road, on the left, to the ancient town of Rocca Giovine, an old town even in Horace's day, which was perched on the very edge of a projecting crag, with sharp, precipitous flanks, hundreds of feet high, on every side but one. This is the Vacuna of Horace, behind whose ancient shrine, already in decay, Horace wrote one of his charming epistles to a dear friend at Rome, Aristius Fuscus by name, closing the same with these words: "*Haec tibi dictabam fanum post putre Vacunae.*"

Horace was taking a ramble one beautiful day, apparently, tablet in hand, and, finding a quiet nook back of the temple of Juno Victrix (identical with the Sabine goddess Vacuna), with a magnificent prospect over the Valley of the Digentia, penned the sprightly epistle which has come down to us. At his feet, to the north and about a mile distant, lay his little estate which Maecenas had given him. Embowered in the leafy branches of chestnut and olive trees, far below, he could doubtless catch glimpses of the modest villa, which is almost as familiar to us as it was to Horace himself. The quiet was broken only by the distant tinkling of goat bells, possibly from Horace's own herds, as they ranged the hillsides below, and the shrill bleating of the young kids. The amphitheater of hills which encircle the little valley, on whose western edge lay Horace's estate, rises some three or four thousand feet above the plain and their upper slopes, at least, must have been well wooded in his day. Their lower slopes, too, were highly cultivated then, in marked contrast to their present desolation, and many a vine-covered cottage of Horace's country neighbors bore charming testimony to the prosperity and contentment of the neighborhood. In the numerous remains which have been uncovered by the peasants' plow and the excavations of the archaeologists, we have abundant evidence that the little valley was well settled. The little valley, indeed, must have been a veritable beehive of rural industry in those days; and as Horace, from his post behind Vacuna's temple, on that summer day, watched the

lights and shadows from the passing clouds chase each other in rapid succession over vineyard, orchard, pasture land, and tilled fields, with their ripening grain rustling in the breeze, this upper Digentia valley doubtless presented to him as charming a picture of rural life and scenery as could have been offered in all Italy.

Rocca Giovine, Vacuna's degenerate successor, is like all the Sabine hill towns, picturesque enough at a distance, but within the houses are in a tumbledown condition, the streets are muddy and dung becovered, with pigs running everywhere and wallowing in the vile pools which are common enough in the absence of anything like systematic drainage. The children, about the only people one sees in the streets, are lively, handsome, and annoyingly curious, but at least are not beggars, as the children almost always are in the larger towns of Italy. The stock seems virile and sturdy, like the Sabine stock of old, and remains, even today, remarkably pure and unmixed.

We retrace our steps and are soon on the main highway again, but our little donkey is determined to make his way back to Vicovaro, in spite of our driver's furious jerking of the reins and cracking of the whip about the donkey's ears. Our driver finally descends, turns the donkey about by main force, fairly pulling him along the up-stream road, in spite of the fact that the little beast had hauled all three of us, with the ponderous cart, up the steep hill to Rocca Giovine, and remounts only when the donkey is well under way again. As we approach our destination, the hills become much steeper and loftier and draw close to the little stream, shutting it in on every side till it is all but impossible to detect either its entrance to or exit from the rolling plateau which constitutes, as it were, the pit of an amphitheater. Here we hitch our donkey and follow a rude pathway through the rolling fields, climbing numerous stone walls, till we reach the ridge of the low foothill, on the northerly slope of which the supposed site of Horace's villa is located. We climb another wall and find our driver already scraping away the surface soil and exposing to view a stretch, several feet square, of tessellated pavement, composed of alternate insertions of tiny squares of black serpentine and white marble. Our driver-guide assures us that this pavement extends over a considerable

area, a fact which I verify by running my walking stick here and there through the six inches or more of overlying earth. On the outer edge of the area, where the pavement is beginning to break up, we remove the earth and gather a handful of the little peg-shaped tesserae, perhaps an eighth of an inch square on the top and half to three-quarters of an inch long. I cannot do better at this point than to quote briefly from an article by Professor R. H. Borge in the *Journal of the British and American Archaeological Society of Rome*, for the years 1894-95. In this article Professor Borge says:

It was reserved for the learned Abbé de Sanctis of Tivoli and the Abbé Capmartin de Chapuy, an enterprising Frenchman, to determine the exact spot where Horace's farmhouse stood. Toward the middle of the last [i.e. the eighteenth] century De Sanctis induced Baron de Santodille, Ambassador of Tuscany to the Holy See, to carry on excavations in the Valley of the Licenza with a view to ascertain whether any remains of the poet's farmhouse were still extant. The excavations were directed by the Abbé de Sanctis himself, who, after many patient and diligent researches, came upon the fragments of ancient walls in reticulated work, and the mosaic floors of six chambers. He discovered, also, an underground passage and a leaden water pipe marked "M. Barrus"; but, as nothing else was found to draw his attention, he was satisfied with the discovery he had made and the ground whereon the interesting remains stood was in part covered up again. His conviction that the ruins belonged to Horace's country house, seeing the little advance made in archaeology at the time, rested chiefly on the fact that, at a short distance from them, at a tenement called Vigna la Carte, which is about 150 feet higher than the mound on which the ruins were discovered, a copious and perennial spring of cool water gushes out and gives rise to the river Digentia—"Fons etiam rivo dare nomen idoneus" (*Epist.* i. xvi, 12). The late Chev. Berti, of the Public Works Department, found its volume to be two gallons two quarts per second and its temperature 51 degrees Fahrenheit.

So much for Professor Borge and the learned Abbé de Sanctis and Capmartin de Chapuy, the latter of whom afterward published a curious and learned work on the subject in three large volumes.

The walls of *opus reticulatum* were not in evidence at the time of my visit, having been reburied by De Sanctis and, apparently, never since excavated. They were, clearly, the walls of the basement story of Horace's villa and the pavement seen by me was that of the six up-stairs chambers mentioned by De Chapuy in his three-volume work on the subject. The borders of the mosaic pavement were ornamented by black and white rhombs and triangles and the

tiling of one chamber was composed of a white ground with a border of black animals. The discovery of De Sanctis received official sanction from the local Tax Book, the estate on which the remains stand being entered in this book as the "Villa d' Orazio." These ruins are now generally accepted by scholars as marking the true site of Horace's villa. Near the remains are numerous chestnut and olive trees, possibly descendants of those which stood there in Horace's day.

Just north of the pavement which I have described, and on the brow of the ridge, is a diminutive grotto, where are stored numerous remains—potsherds, rough vases, etc.—which have been dug up on the grounds adjoining the villa. Perhaps half a mile to the north, on a bold, jutting headland, across the ravine where winds the bed of the little stream, stands the village of Licenza, both village and stream bearing the same name, Licenza, as they bore the same name, Digentia, in Horace's day. This was, doubtless, Horace's nearest town and his short, stout figure must have been a familiar sight on its streets between the years 34 and 8 B.C. The lower slopes of Monte Campanile, the Lucretilis of Horace, at the foot of which lay his farm, are still scantily wooded with ilexes and holms; but the rest of the range, known as Monte Gennaro, which here encircles the valley of the Digentia, is entirely bare of trees, though covered apparently with a good growth of grass. Horace's farm certainly covered the lower slopes of Lucretilis and possibly extended as far as the confines of Vacuna. We do not know its extent, but he himself tells us that he leased portions of it to five freedmen, each with his own domicile, and kept eight slaves for the cultivation of the unrented portion. It is fair to assume a minimum of four jugera or, say, two and one-half acres, for each tenant and each slave, that being the maximum legal holding for a Roman citizen under the later republic, or a total of, say, thirty-three acres. It is more likely that the estate covered one hundred acres or more, as the upper reaches would have been suitable only for pasturage. If so, it would have extended from the Licenza well toward the top of Lucretilis, thus affording a considerable diversity of temperature and a considerable variety of crops. Some three or four hundred yards up the hill, to the west of the site of

the villa, is the cascade known as the Fons Bandusiae. This is today, whatever it may have been in Horace's time, a considerable streamlet, pouring from an open aqueduct some ten feet high into an artificially shaped reservoir in the native rock, and thence, over the horseshoe-shaped rim of the latter, some twenty-five or thirty feet into what had once been a circular basin, fifty feet or more in diameter. The masonry along the outer edge of this lower basin was broken away in places and the water flowed away somewhat widely over the brow of the neighboring slope into a narrow channel below and thence into the Digentia. Along the basin's rim were several symmetrically shaped stones of considerable size, which may have served as pedestals for the columns of an arbor, originally surrounding the basin. In their original state the two falls and the two basins, shut in by holms and ilexes above and below—several still remain—must have been wonderfully beautiful and, as Horace says, doubtless afforded refreshing coolness to the oxen, fatigued with the plow, and to the ranging flocks. It far surpassed my expectations and, in its prime, was surely worthy to rank as "one of the famous fountains." This little streamlet had flowed down the mountain side and plunged over the tiny precipice on its way to the Mediterranean for countless ages, unsung and unknown; but one day a poet touched it, as it were, with a magic wand, and, from that day to this, this little Sabine fountain has held a place in human interest beside that of Helen of Troy, of the Three Hundred who fell at Thermopylae, and of the fair peasant Maid of Orleans; and there it shall abide as long as human hearts leap up when they behold a rainbow in the sky or thrill with ecstasy as they catch the melodious note of the skylark, winging its upward flight.

Fain would we have lingered longer in this region of loveliness and poetic association, but the long return journey bade us hasten. We reluctantly retrace our steps to the remains of the villa and take a last look at the peaceful hills—a treeless and waterless Buttermere—upon which the eyes of the Sabine poet rested so often and which brought to his pen so much of inspiration and to his spirit so much of contentment and philosophic calm.

A less ardent lover of nature than Wordsworth, among the moderns, Horace was more dependent upon his fellows for his

happiness than was the poet of the Rothsays. With Horace the "noctes cenaecque deum" was a more dominant note than even the charming and incomparable phrases in which he catches and immortalizes the fleeting play of lights and shadows over the face of Lucretilis or the soft whisperings of the woodland nymphs in the ilex groves and olive orchards about his Sabine villa. The real Horace is so variant, so elusive, at once so shy and so confiding, that his critics and his interpreters almost never agree in their analysis of his personality. This manifoldness, even contradictoriness, of mood and profession it is which enables him to appeal sympathetically to such widely different types of mind and makes him easily the best beloved of all the ancient writers—a Robert Burns among the classics. He is an epitome of all human nature. We can no more tell why we love him than why we do not love his modern antithesis, Dr. Fell.

As we wend our way back to the main traveled road, where our diminutive donkey has been grazing while we have been alternately reflecting and rhapsodizing, we stop in an adjoining field to scrutinize certain capitols, pedestals, and broken columns and water mains, the remains perhaps of a neighboring temple. Here the local peasants—for word of our little pilgrimage has spread rapidly through the neighborhood—crowd about us with insistent offers of well-stained, possibly time-stained, bits of marble, all, we are assured, from the "Villa d' Orazio," which they are eager to exchange for a few centissimi. We escape their importunities by precipitate flight and remount our "voiture," and soon the little donkey is madly dashing along the descending roadway toward Vicovaro, to the sharply resounding cracks of our Jehu's lash. We meet numerous peasants, on foot and on donkey back, returning from Vicovaro, which still, as in Horace's day, is the market town of all this region. At Vicovaro we exchange our tired donkey for a larger and fresher one, and exchange, too, our driver, the father for the son, a presentable fellow seventeen or eighteen years old, and go, mostly on the gallop, to Tivoli, seven miles distant. We miss our four o'clock train, but escape the rain which comes on at dusk. The six o'clock train is a slow one and brings us, after endless stops and weary waitings at small way-stations,

to Rome—how pregnant the name!—at eight o'clock, in time for dinner.

Another day we visit the small and ancient-looking stone building in an open triangle at the junction of the Via Maecenate and Via Merulana, known as the Auditorium di Maecenate. Here were formerly located Maecenas' villa and gardens on the Esquiline. Now, however, the Via Merulana is the scene of a turbulent life, half-petty business, half-crowded tenement, and swarms with innumerable dirty children. How many of these passing thousands, I wonder, know that the little time-stained and storm-beaten building yonder is all that remains of Maecenas' famous Auditorium and that here Horace and Vergil were wont to meet the emperor Augustus and his great minister, Maecenas, and to give to them the first readings of those poems which have long been numbered among the priceless treasures of the world's greatest literature. And I wonder, too, how many would understand or care, even if they knew. There, on the Esquiline and quite near to their great patron, both Vergil and Horace lived when in Rome. Somewhere in Maecenas' garden, perhaps beneath the very street along which we are passing, Horace's mortal part is said to have been buried. Wherever it was, his ashes have long since become part and parcel of old Mother Earth, from which they came; but his fame has filled the world in splendid fulfilment of his own prescient lines:

I've reared a monument, my own,
More durable than brass;
Yea, kingly pyramids of stone
In height it doth surpass.

Rain shall not sap nor driving blast
Disturb its settled base,
Nor countless ages, rolling past,
Its symmetry deface.

I shall not wholly die, some part,
Nor that a little, shall
Escape the dark destroyer's dart
And his grim festival.